

Third Sunday of Lent – March 15, 2020, Year A

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 4:5-26, 39-42

***“Barriers”***

This is a very interesting situation that Jesus finds Himself in. This follows right in the footsteps of Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus, in the shadows of night in John chapter 3. Here Jesus is meeting with a Samaritan woman. The long-despised Samaritans were not the friends of the Jewish people. Many devout Jewish men would not have allowed themselves to be alone with a woman, let alone a Samaritan woman, and certainly not in conversation with her.

Ever since some of the Jewish exiles had come back from Babylon, they found that the central section of their ancient land was occupied by a group of people who claimed to be the true descendants of Abraham, and who were against the return of the exiles. Since that time there had been constant trouble between the two peoples. Sometimes it had broken out into physical skirmishes, leading to bloodshed and even murder. But mostly it was simply a matter of not mixing together. The Jews wouldn't have anything to do with the Samaritans and vice versa. It even went so far as they wouldn't share eating and drinking vessels with each other. But here we have Jesus asking this Samaritan woman for a drink. Furthermore, she has a questionable reputation.

The normal time for a woman to come to Jacob's well, which was a distance from the center of town, would be at a cooler time of day, most likely first thing in the morning or later in the afternoon. This woman has come to the well at the time when she is least likely to meet anyone—at least, anyone who knows her, her past and her immoral lifestyle. The last thing she would want would be to rub shoulders with the other women of the town, and they would feel the same way about her. Jesus knows all about this, but still He engages her in conversation. And so Jesus, is asking her for a drink, and tells this woman that she should have asked Him for one. She surprisingly thinks He means it in the usual sense.

Jesus tells her that if she really knew who she was talking to, that He would give her 'living water.' In first century Israel they would call "living water" water that was moving in a stream or river, rather than a pool or well, water that's more likely to be fresh and clean than water that's been standing around getting stagnant. More importantly, Jesus isn't referring to physical water, whether still or moving. He is referring to the new life that He is offering to anyone, anyone at all, no matter what their gender, their geography, their racial or moral background. What Jesus says about this 'living water' makes it clear that He's talking about something quite different. Not only will the water He's offering quench your thirst so that you'll never be thirsty again, but it will become a spring that is bubbling up inside of you, refreshing you with the new life coming into the world with Jesus and which is the life of the whole new world that God is making through Him.

Fascinated by Jesus' offer of 'living water,' she asks to have some – not realizing that if you want to take Jesus up on His offer of running, pure water, bubbling up inside you, you will have to get rid of the stale, moldy, stagnant water you've been living off all this time. In her case it was her married life – or rather, her unmarried life. Jesus knew exactly what her life was like,

and what was going on. This woman has had a life filled with one emotional upheaval after another, with enough husbands coming and going to keep all the gossips in this village babbling for weeks. I guess that her various marriages ended in divorce, whether legal or informal, and not with the death of these men in question. We don't know what has happened in her life that has made it harder for her to have lasting relationships, but she knew her life was a mess, and she knew that Jesus knew it too, and He even told her so, in detail. Jesus made it clear to her that it wasn't important where you worshipped, as the Samaritans believed that Mount Gerizim was God's holy mountain and the Jews of course believed that Mount Zion, in Jerusalem – with the Temple was where they should worship.

Jesus didn't mince words and told her, *"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."* The woman said, *"I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."* Then Jesus declared, *"I who speak to you am he."* (John 4:21-26) With this in her mind, she left her jar at the well and went back to town to tell others who she just met. Can you imagine what that must have been like – coming and meeting with the Savior of the world in person? This must not have been an easy conversation for her.

There were at least three levels that Jesus overcame in dealing with this Samaritan woman.

- First, the gender barrier – as Jewish rabbis would never be seen speaking with a woman in public. They wouldn't even speak to their wives or daughters outside of the privacy of their homes. Many would even close their eyes when they saw a woman on the street.
- Second there is the racial barrier – Jews versus Samaritans – which He unquestionably crossed in order to get not only to the heart of the matter, but to change this woman's heart.
- Lastly, Jesus overcame the social barrier, being a rabbi or teacher, people viewed Him with respect – at least those who heard His teachings or witnessed or heard of His miracles that He performed. His reputation was unquestionable, while this woman's was quite questionable. She was a social outcast, and Jesus' speaking to her would have left Him open to charges of breaking the unspoken rules of social etiquette. When the apostles returned they were surprised that He was talking to her, but not one of them asked Him why He was talking to her.

This woman had been deeply touched by Jesus' talk with her, and her testimony to the towns people had a remarkably tremendous effect. Listen to these words from today's Holy Gospel, John 4:39-42, *"Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of*

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*what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”*

Jesus had crossed those barriers, just as He, His Word, and His people – believers, do today. True believers in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Messiah, are following His example to step out of our comfort zones to interact with people who are radically different from ourselves, and carry His message of truth and love into neighborhoods, cities, countries, and hearts – where people most dearly need Him. It may not be to a foreign country – it may be the people next door or across the street – who clearly do not have Jesus leading their lives. When we are truly devoted to sharing the good news and love of Jesus Christ with others, the Holy Spirit will help us to overcome any barriers – and that includes the Corona Virus.

This is about faith, truth and trust in the Lord. Let us continue to be an example to others – praying and caring for those who have been effected by this illness – taking the precautions that we need to do, overcoming barriers – washing our hands, staying out of crowded places, and not veering off of the message of faith and trust. The Apostle Paul had it right when he wrote Romans 8:37-39, *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*